

Carbon County Profile

Prepared for the:
Dixie, Fishlake & Manti-La Sal National Forests
Forest Plan Revision
Social and Economic Assessment

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**December
2003**

CARBON COUNTY OVERVIEW



County Land Ownership*

45.5% — Bureau of Land Mgt.

40.8% — Private

10.7% — State Trust Lands

3.0% — Forest Service

0.3% — Water

0.01% — State Wildlife

0% — Wilderness Areas

**numbers submitted by Carbon County*

9.8% — Wilderness Study Area
(within BLM total)

County Planned Uses

48% — Watershed

42% — Mining & Grazing

6.3% — Mountain Range

2.7% — Residential

0.6% — Industrial

source: Carbon County

This overview contains observations drawn from the maps, economic and demographic trend data, and a review of county plans contained in this profile. In addition, it contains comments and explanations of county leaders and residents, gathered at workshops conducted to review this assessment.

Landscape

Carbon County is a mix of high plateaus and low agricultural valleys. County leaders stated that the county contains over 200,000 acres of agricultural land. Most of Carbon County's residents live in the agricultural Price River Valley and at the foot of the Book Cliffs, near mineral and energy resources. The county has a greater amount of private land when compared to many other counties in southern Utah. The maps illustrate the importance of the forest lands to the local communities as there are very few significant groundwater aquifers in the area.

Population

Carbon County's population remained nearly unchanged between 1990 and 2000, but demographic projections made by the State show a modest growth rate for the next three decades as well as an aging population. The county has experienced population booms and busts in the past, primarily related to mining employment. The county's median household and per capita income levels, also tied to mining employment, are among the highest of the rural counties, often comparable to those the State as a whole, which is dominated by higher-paying urban industries.

Economy

While farming and ranching were the basis for settlement and the early economy, coal mining became the major catalyst for development in both Carbon and Emery counties. The region experienced a rapid economic ascent with the growth of the mining industry followed by an equally rapid decline as the mining sector decreased sharply from 1980 to the present. The floods of 1983 set off landslides that closed off Highway 6, cutting off trade also caused a sharp temporary downturn in the economy. Mining is projected to continue the decline as a proportion of the economy although ongoing efforts to develop the mining economy are starting to create new jobs. Local residents believe coalbed methane has tremendous potential to spur economic growth in the mining sector. Other growing resource industries in the county include Questar and

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Current Issues

*intergovernmental
communication
regional economy
watershed protection
transportation
trails planning
protecting agricultural land
and grazing permits*

CO₂-related industries, as well as possible development of the tar sands resources. Grazing is still important to some county residents, and agricultural production is directly linked to public lands grazing. County leaders point to a steady decline in AUMs on public lands in the last 40 years and expressed frustration with plans to remove more permits to graze on public lands. Residents feel the multiplier effect of grazing and mining/mineral development, as they create related jobs locally, is important to recognize in making these decisions

While many residents wish for the return of high-paying mining jobs to boost the economy. The population and economy is growing nonetheless, due primarily to the growth of the services, non-farm proprietors, government and trade sectors. County leaders mentioned significant growth in construction, mechanical services, truck shops, and electronic support facilities. Service sector jobs are expected to continue growing, largely because of technology improvements.

Although much of travel-related spending is currently due to business and technical education conducted in the county, recreation and tourism are elements of economic growth and vitality. Carbon County is working to improve recreational opportunities related to outdoor recreation, historic and pre-historic sites, the fairgrounds, and education. One example of this would be the improvement of the Nine-Mile Canyon area. Comments made during a BLM RMP scoping workshop indicated that roughly 80% of recreation in the County is related to OHVs, and takes place more on BLM lands than in the forest. In response, the county wishes to assemble a map of OHV trails and complimentary tourist businesses such as hotels and restaurants. Carbon County also anticipates the benefits of growth at the College of Eastern Utah and points to the changes in education in the county as evidence for making CEU a 4-year institution. They are hoping that this will double the school's enrollment, and translate to more jobs.

The County defines their biggest social and economic threat as the Gooseberry Narrows project because of its affect on culinary and industrial water supply.

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Planning

Carbon County depends heavily on water from the Price River and watershed protection is an ongoing challenge. The County's groundwater is unusable due to the high salinity. The Carbon Water Committee was created to investigate the uses to which Price River water is applied. Coordination with public lands agencies is also a priority in order to represent local economic interests and streamline processes. The county wants a common-sense approach to solutions rather than just appearing obstructionist to federal and state actions. To this end, the county has recently revised the Public Lands Element of their General Plan created by their county Land and Access Committee. This is further highlighted in *Appendix A8-Local Examples of Collaboration*. They also want the USFS and BLM to honor the NFMA and FLPMA requirements to consider and respect local planning documents. Carbon County also wants to ensure that private lands are used in a manner consistent with their values and rural character. County planning attempts to provide a land use scheme that is compatible yet favorable to new business and diverse housing projects while simultaneously improving community attractiveness in order to promote tourism. There is also some interest in working to develop roads in coalbed methane areas that could also serve as OHV trails. Planning documents reviewed, which were available at the time of this assessment, include:

Public Lands and Resources, Carbon County, Master Plan Revision, 2003

Carbon County, Master Plan, 1997

Goals & Objectives for Carbon County Tourism

Development Code of Carbon County, 2003